The international crime victims surveys

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The International Crime Victims Surveys: A retrospective

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Abstract

The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) has been carried out six times over the period 1989–2010. Although national and city samples are relatively small, the ICVS is a unique survey of the experience of being victimized in that it is standardized and far-reaching: it has been conducted in more than 80 countries in different regions of the world, with many countries having taken part more than once. This paper focuses not on the methodology of the survey but on four important areas of analysis that capitalize on the comparative nature of the ICVS, and its ability to look at victimization experience at the level of both individuals and countries. Firstly, it looks at the level of crime in different countries according to the ICVS, compared to the picture from police figures. It shows some distinct differences. Also taken up is how far the correlates of victimization risk are similar across countries, and whether the phenomenon of repeat victimization holds constantly. A special focus is on results from a multi-level analysis of the relationships between firearm ownership as measured by the ICVS and rates of serious violent crime victimization at the individual and national levels. The second focus of the paper concerns what ICVS measures of trends in crime show relative to trends in police figures. It looks here, too, at the relationships between the level of household security in different countries as shown by the ICVS and trends in property crime. The third focus is on victims reporting crime to the police and their level of satisfaction with the police response, as well as the provision of and need for specialized victim assistance, underlining the importance of the ICVS as an instrument to monitor

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the implementation of international standards on victims' rights, and to benchmark national victim policies. The fourth focus of the paper is on attitudes towards crime and criminal justice, looking in particular at similarities and differences across country populations. One feature is a multi-level analysis of the social correlates of public attitudes towards punishment, in particular differentiating between victims and non-victims. The paper ends with some comment on the prospects for the ICVS in the future.

Keywords
Victim surveys, victimization risk, repeat victimization, trends in crime, punitiveness

At a special meeting on crime prevention of the Council of Europe in Barcelona at the end of 1987, plans for a standardized survey of crime victims were aired for the first time (van Dijk et al., 1987). In the next year, Pat Mayhew, Martin Killias and Jan van Dijk actually launched the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), a standardized victimization survey modelled after the Dutch, British and Swiss national surveys (van Dijk et al., 1990). The survey went into the field for the first time in 1989 in 13 nations. The surveys have since, with some adjustments, been carried out in five subsequent sweeps, with intervals of four or five years (1992, 1996, 2000, 2005 and 2010). The last round in 2010 was conducted in 13 countries (van Dijk, 2012). Altogether the ICVS has to date been carried out once or more in 80 countries from all world regions. The full dataset is available for secondary analyses. It can be downloaded from a newly launched website of Lausanne University (http://www3.unil.ch/wpmu/icvs/, last accessed 11 July 2013).

The ICVS built upon and mirrors some fairly generic features of victimization surveys, such as interviewing representative samples from national or city populations (in our case samples of 1000–2000 respondents) about their experiences of crime, using face-to-face interviewing or, where possible, Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Respondents were screened for experiences of victimization over a given 'recall period' of five years, and were then asked to focus on their experiences over the past 12 months. The ICVS screener questions cover a limited selection of common crimes. The screener questions use definitions and concepts based on colloquial language rather than the law. Respondents were interviewed about possible victimizations that can be seen as affecting the household as a whole (theft of a car, theft from a car, theft of a motorcycle or moped, theft of a bicycle, burglary and attempted burglary). The respondent also answered about his/her personal experience in relation to theft of personal property, robbery, sexual offences, assault and threats and, in later rounds, bribe-seeking by public officials and credit card fraud. There have been additional questions in different ICVS rounds; these have differed but topics have included the use of crime prevention measures, the seriousness rating of types of crime, fear of crime, and (for victims) the police response and the provision and need for victim support.

In this article we will not address the many and ever-changing methodological issues; nor will we discuss the survey's obvious limitations – these have been dealt with elsewhere (Mayhew and van Dijk, 2011, 2013). Nor will we present the ranking of countries on victimization rates or other key variables.[1] Instead, we will give an overview of the highlights of analytical results, focusing on the uniqueness of the ICVS as an international survey, which has allowed analyses at both the individual and national comparative levels as well as multi-level analyses. Finally, we will make some comment on the prospects for the ICVS in the future.

What has the International Crime Victims Survey shown?

Space precludes documenting the full extent of analytical work done with ICVS data. Just four thematic clusters of results are singled out. Within each cluster we will highlight results that stem from the unique, international nature of the ICVS. The first is what it has shown as to the level of crime in different countries compared to the picture from police figures. In this section we will also look at the victimization risks of different segments of the population and at the phenomenon of repeat victimization. The added value of the ICVS here is to test whether results of bespoke national surveys regarding these phenomena can be seen as universally applicable. As a special focus we will look at the results of a multi-level analysis of the relationships between gun ownership as measured by the ICVS and rates of violent victimizations in which guns were involved, at both the individual and collective level.

The second cluster of results concerns what ICVS measures of trends in crime show relative to trends according to police figures. Here, we present findings on the relationships between the level of security measures as measured by the ICVS in different countries and trends in types of property crime (especially household burglary).

The third set of results relates to the reporting behaviour of victims and levels of satisfaction with police performance, and the provision of, and need for, specialized victim assistance. Our aim here is to underline the importance of the ICVS as an instrument to monitor the implementation of international standards concerning victims' rights, and to benchmark national victim policies.

The fourth cluster of results deals with attitudes towards crime and criminal justice. Here again, the universality of the findings from the ICVS surveys in different countries will be at issue. The special approach is a multi-level analysis of the social correlates of public attitudes towards punishment, in particular differentiating between victims and non-victims.

International Crime Victims Survey and police measures of crime

Van Dijk (2008) looked at 39 countries across the world in relation to 'total ICVS crime' (as measured mainly in 2000) and 'total police recorded crime' around the same period (drawing mainly on the 2000 United Nations (UN) Crime Survey, which collects a range of criminal justice statistics). Figure 1 shows the results. Total ICVS crime is shown in the lighter grey bars as the percentage of those victimized once or more (the victimization rates); 'recorded crime' is shown in the darker grey bars, which represent the total number of crime recorded by the police per 100,000 population.

Figure 1 shows no correlation between the actual level of victimization and the rates of crime recorded by the police ($r = 0.212$; $n = 39$; n.s.). Some countries with exceptionally high recorded crime also show a comparatively high victimization rate (South Africa), but many others do not (e.g., Finland, Canada and Switzerland). Comparisons between country rankings according to the ICVS and police figures were repeated for different types of crime. The results showed positive correlations for robbery ($r = 0.663$, $n = 37$), and theft of cars ($r = 0.353$; $n = 34$), but much weaker (and statistically insignificant) correlations for other types of crime. These results suggest that police figures of recorded crime are nothing but a source of misinformation on the levels of crime when comparing different countries. For comparative studies on levels of crime victimization surveys are therefore an indispensable tool.

The conduct of the ICVS has not just provided a better comparative count of crime. By reducing the 'noise' in international counts of crime it also opened new opportunities for epidemiological

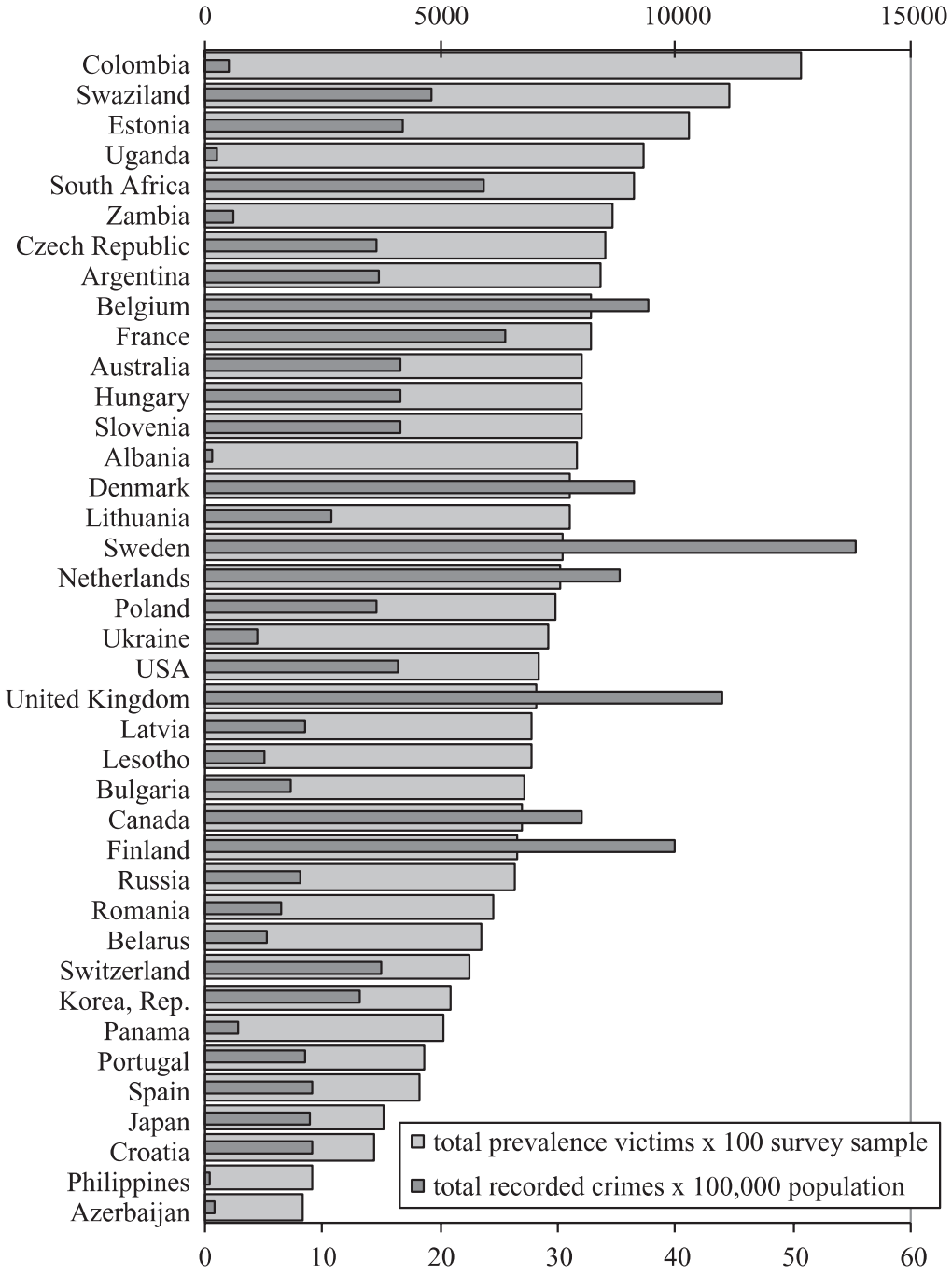

Figure 1. Total crime by countries according to the International Crime Victims Survey (the percentage victimized once or more) and police figures (total recorded crime per 100,000 population).

criminology. The conduct of the ICVS in 80 nations, including all the main Western countries, allows for cross-sectional analyses of relationships between the characteristics of nations and national levels of various types of crime. In the reports on the first rounds of the ICVS, strong correlations were shown between the national ownership rates of cars and bicycles and the rates of thefts of such items. The correlation between ownership of vehicles and theft rates is often regarded as self-evident. On reflection, though, these strong and universal links are far from mundane. If levels of crime are determined by the presence of a more or less fixed number of motivated

offenders (as many motivational criminological theories assume), an increase in available targets would not lead to more crimes but simply to a reduction in the risks of victimization per target. Thus, the finding that levels of theft are invariably strongly linked to ownership levels and that risks per target actually tend to go up with higher ownership rates, are difficult to reconcile with motivational theories. The results on vehicle ownership levels and theft of vehicles rather support the theory that levels of property crime are determined by criminal opportunity structures (Felson and Clarke, 1998). Bicycle theft, like car and motorcycle theft, appears to be clearly driven by availability. Even in otherwise low crime countries, such as China and Japan, the general availability of bicycles generates high rates of bicycle theft as 'crimes of expediency'.

Victimization surveys such as the ICVS are well placed to analyse links between victim characteristics such as vehicle ownership and victimization. The cross-national dataset of the ICVS also allows analyses of other factors and victimization at the country level. Analyses have consistently shown that levels of victimization are positively related to urbanization and age composition (the proportion of young people). In a secondary analysis of ICVS 2000 data, a relationship was also found between victimization and indicators of neighbourhood cohesion (van Wilsem et al., 2003). Victimization by violent crime has also been found to be related to socio-economic inequality and/or poverty, as well as to the consumption of alcohol (van Dijk, 2008).

Data from victimization surveys can shed light on characteristics that act as risk-enhancing or risk-reducing factors. Various theoretical models have been developed to explain how the differential vulnerability of individuals to criminal victimization is determined by their lifestyle or 'routine activities' (Felson, 2002; Hindelang et al., 1978). The ICVS includes information on demographics, such as the age, gender, town size, marital status, income and education level of respondents. Previous multivariate victimological risk analyses using the ICVS datasets have shown that many of these factors have independent effects on victimization by contact crimes. The ICVS 2004 data were analysed using a log linear analysis to determine how relevant factors influence victimization risks independently of each other (van Kesteren et al., 2000). The results presented in Table 1 show that youth increases the risk of victimization, especially for contact crimes; likewise, seniority acts as protective factor. The second most important risk factor is the size of the place in which people live; those living in large cities are most at risk. A third risk factor for victimization by contact crime is the status of being single. Other personal characteristics are less salient in explaining differential risks. However, in some rounds of the ICVS a question was included on the frequency of going out at night. This factor was found to explain a considerable amount of victimization, especially for contact crimes.

Repeat victimization

In the ICVS questionnaire, respondents who report a victimization of a particular type are asked how often they have been victimized by such a crime in the course of the last year. Having been a victim recently has been found to be a strong predictor of future victimization, controlling for other factors. In the ICVS (1998, 1992 and 1996), the percentages of victims who were revictimized in the course of the same year varies from 45% among victims of sexual incidents and 35% among victims of threats/assaults to 25% among victims of robberies and 15% among victims of burglaries (Farrell and Bouloukos, 2001). Analyses of the 2000 ICVS dataset have shown that such repeat victimization constitutes 40% of all crime for the 11 crime types in the 17 industrialized countries (Farrell et al., 2005). This includes across-crime-type as well as within-crime-type repeats. Aggregate rates were highest in the UK (52% of all crime), The Netherlands (48%) and the

Table 1. Controlled effects of risk factors (odds ratios) on victimization in 1999: 2000 International Crime Victims Survey (16 countries)[a].

	Crimes against property				Contact crimes			
	Car thefts[b] (owners)	Burglary and attempts	Petty crimes[c]	All property crimes	Robbery, assaults and threats	Sexual incidents (women)	All contact crimes	Any crime
Town size								
(Base = <10,000)								
10–100,000	1.26	1.14	1.39	1.33	1.48	1.96	1.53	1.39
>100,000	1.81	1.43	1.58	1.60	1.47	2.51	1.57	1.64
Income[d]								
(Base = low)								
High	1.42	1.11	1.33	1.39	1.16	1.17	1.14	1.33
Age								
(Base=55+)								
25–54	1.66	1.00	1.73	1.61	1.92	8.05	2.15	1.72
16–24	2.34	1.04	2.27	2.04	2.51	15.48	2.05	2.31
Going out[e]								
(Base = not often)								
Often	1.18	1.17	1.21	1.22	1.25	1.45	1.28	1.23
Married								
(Base = married)								
Not married	1.27	1.47	1.15	1.18	1.99	2.40	2.00	1.29
Education[f]								
(Base = low)								
High	1.02	1.10	1.07	1.11	1.01	0.96	1.04	1.10
Gender								
(Base = female)								
Male	1.10	0.96	1.01	1.02	1.19	–	–	0.99

[a] The odd ratios are based on prevalence rates in 1999 (% victimized once or more). Controlled means that each category (e.g. town size) is considered controlling for associations with all other categories.

[b] Car thefts are thefts of and from cars. Motorcycle thefts are included in 'all property crimes'.

[c] 'Petty crimes' cover car vandalism, bicycle theft and thefts of personal property.

[d] Those on 'lower' incomes have an income less than the average in each country. Those on 'higher' incomes earn more than the average.

[e] The 'going out' variable is based on answers to a question about how many times people usually go out in the evening. Those counted as 'often' indicated they went out at least once a week or more. Those counted as 'not often' go out less frequently.

[f] Those with 'lower' education are in the lower half of the educational distribution. Those with 'higher' education are in the upper half of the distribution.

US (47%). Japan was the only country where repeat victimization constituted less than a third of all crime reported to the ICVS. Subsequent analyses focusing on repeat victims have revealed that this subgroup tends to be less satisfied with their treatment by the police, to have less trust in their neighbours, and to be less inclined to report further victimization to the police (van Dijk, 2001). The ICVS thus bears testimony to the fact that in almost all countries repeat victims ought to be made the target of special policies of prevention and victim care.

The guns–violence link

A unique asset of the ICVS is the possibility of carrying out multi-level analyses to see how victimization risks reflect both the characteristics of victims and non-victims, and the wider context in which they are placed. An example here is an analysis of handgun and other gun ownership (which the ICVS unusually measures) and violent victimization incidents in which guns were involved (van Kesteren, 2013).

The results show that rates of ownership of handguns are positively related to victimization rates for contact crimes involving firearms, including assaults and threats involving a gun. A positive but statistically insignificant relation is found between handgun ownership and victimization by contact crimes generally. This finding confirms the earlier result that rates of victimization by assaults and threats are unrelated to handgun ownership (van Dijk, 2008). There is no correlation at national level between handgun ownership and victimization by property crime. Nor is there any relationship between long-gun ownership and any type of victimization. These results show that analyses of the gun–violence link at the macro level should focus on handgun ownership.

In multi-level analyses of the ICVS data we have looked at gun ownership, which comes out as an independent predictor of victimization by contact crimes in countries with low, average and high levels of gun availability. Table 2 shows the results of the analysis.

The results depicted in the right-hand column show that in all three categories of countries handgun owners are significantly more at risk of experiencing an incident involving a gun than non-handgun owners, controlling for several other factors. This finding refutes the idea that gun ownership offers protection against gun attacks. The risk-enhancing effects are largest for owners in countries where relatively few inhabitants own guns – suggesting that many gun owners exhibit a distinct lifestyle, for example involvement with criminal activities, which enhances their risk of a gun assault. In countries with high ownership levels, individuals who own guns are probably less atypical, although they also run somewhat higher risks than others of being assaulted by someone with a gun. As expected, no similar relationships were found concerning the ownership of long guns. By and large the results offer little support for the notion that more guns bring about less crime.

To conclude, at the community level, high levels of gun ownership seem to have conflicting effects on levels of violence. When conflicts arise in high-gun environments, the stakes in a fight are relatively high. This may deter some would-be attackers and prevent acts of simple violence. In other words, would-be attackers may feel less restrained in low-gun countries, such as Great Britain and The Netherlands. At the same time, in high-gun countries the risks of escalation to more serious and lethal violence are higher. On balance, considerably more serious crimes of violence are committed in such countries. For this reason, the stringent gun reduction policies of many governments seem to be a sensible public health approach. At the individual level, the statistical facts are unambiguous. Contrary to what has been claimed by proponents of widespread gun ownership in the USA (e.g. Lott, 1998), those households that own guns run higher risks of seeing their

Table 2. Controlled effects of personal gun ownership and levels of national gun ownership (odds ratios) on victimizations involving guns (controlling for age, gender and city size).

Gun level	Gun owner	Long gun	Handgun	
Low (<1%)	No	1.00	1.00	(Base)
	Yes	2.08	6.94*	
Average (>1%–<5%)	No	1.30	1.17	
	Yes	1.60	6.49*	
High (>5%)	No	1.46	1.50	
	Yes	1.15	2.44*	

Source: van Kesteren (2013). * $p < 0.05$ on a Chi-squared test.

members being criminally victimized, either by other household members or by outsiders who are not deterred from attacking. This result certainly sheds serious doubt on the notion of gun ownership as a protective factor.

Trends in crime

Of the countries that have taken part in the ICVS since 1989, there are 15 developed countries about which information is available from at least four different rounds, enabling an analysis of trends in crime over the last 10–15 years. The average victimization rates for these countries showed them to have peaked halfway through the 1990s but to have declined since. The pattern for individual countries was nearly always the same. The drops are most pronounced in vehicle-related crime and burglary. In looking at trends in crime, van Dijk and Tseloni (2012) used results from countries that had taken part in four or five rounds of the ICVS between 1989 and 2004/2005. Rates of overall victimization in North America (Canada and the USA), Australia and the nine European countries for which ICVS based trend data are available, show distinct downward trends. The drop in crime in the USA was already evident between the 1989 and 1992 ICVS rounds. The turning point came somewhat later in Canada, most European countries and Australia. Trend data were available from only two middle-income cities in the developing world, but these also point at a downturn in overall victimization since 1996 (Buenos Aires) or 2000 (Johannesburg). In a separate analysis, van Dijk and Tseloni (2012) centred on 10 European countries. In all the countries except Belgium, rates of victimization in 2005 and/or 2010 were significantly lower than those of about 10 years before.

In a secondary analysis of ICVS trend data, Farrell et al. (2011) have detected a distinct sequencing in the drops in different types of crime. Across countries, car theft was the first type of crime to drop, followed by burglaries, thefts from cars, thefts from the person, and finally assaults. The uniformity of this sequence suggests that across countries similar factors reducing specific types of crime have come into play at the same time. Car thefts may have been the first to drop because the relatively high losses to car owners and insurers propelled early investments in security. Farrell et al. (2011) put forward the hypothesis that car theft is a 'debut crime'. Early reductions in car theft may have slowed down the initiation of young people into an offending lifestyle. Based on anecdotal evidence, it seems plausible that burglaries may also act as debut crimes for offenders, later moving on to commit robberies, and engage in drug dealing and extortion of business people. The international drops in all types of crime, then, might have been triggered by early improvements in car and

household security, resulting in drops in car theft and burglary with subsequent knock-on effects for other, more serious types of crime.

Van Dijk and Tseloni (2012) note the fortuity of the ICVS being initiated in time to register the rise in volume crime, its general 'peaking' around the mid-1990s, and its subsequent decline since. Moreover, the ICVS covered a wider range of countries than alternative standalone survey counts did. In addition, across this broad range of countries, the ICVS offered a picture of identical falls in crime, independent of changes in crime reporting or recording per country. It would be unfair to say that the ICVS holds credit for the criminological 'bombshell' of the international drop in crime, but in helping to document this, it has greatly added to the case that parochial (national) popular explanations of the fall in crime – such as policing improvements, greater imprisonment, economic conditions, etc. – are not adequate.

Responsive securitization

As discussed elsewhere, rates of victimization are determined by interactions between the rational choices of offenders and victims in a market of crime (van Dijk, 1994). As long as the benefits of crime outweigh the costs of offending, the pool of offenders will expand and crime rates go up. Resulting rises in the losses of crime to victims makes investment in self-protection on the part of potential victims more worthwhile. Pools of well-protected potential victims expand, shrinking criminal opportunities for crime. When the scale of such *responsive securitization* reaches a critical level, potential new offenders are discouraged from entering the criminal market, and crime rates start to fall.

As discussed above, the second type of crime that started to fall across Western nations after car theft was household burglary. Over the years, several forms of household security have been introduced, such as high-security locks and bolts, burglar alarms, lighting, etc. In the ICVS, respondents are asked about the installation of basic security measures such as a burglar alarm. In a secondary analysis of data from 114 regions in Europe and North America, collected in the first two sweeps of the ICVS, we looked at the relationships between regional levels of affluence, degree of urbanization, burglary victimization rates, fear of burglary and the use of burglar alarms (van Dijk, 1995). Figure 2 shows the results in the form of a structural model that explains a fair amount of the variation in levels of burglary victimization and burglar alarm ownership.

In simple terms, the model shows first of all strong links between the level of burglary in different regions and fear of burglary, and between fear of burglary and the purchase of burglar alarms. It also shows that people living in relatively wealthy and urbanized regions tend to live more often in detached houses and to experience more burglaries. These results can be seen as an empirical illustration of the model of responsive securitization concerning household burglary. In wealthier regions more people live in detached houses, which offer greater opportunities for burglars. In such regions, burglary victimization rates are higher. These negative experiences generate increased awareness of risks and lead to improvement in self protection, including expensive measures that affluent people can best afford. While the model shows that responsive security takes place, it falls short of showing that reduced opportunities for burglary through improved protection subsequently result in lower rates of burglary victimization. To test this final step in the model longitudinal data are needed. The litmus test of the impact of responsive securitization on burglary rates is whether local or national trends in burglary victimization rates can be predicted by the penetration rate of security measures: in other words, do countries with a higher penetration of household security experience lower burglary rates in the years ahead?

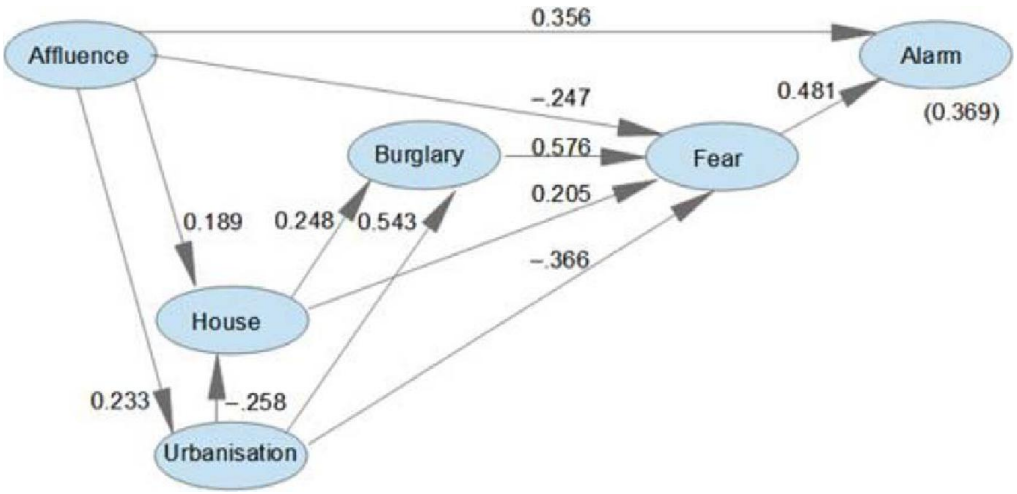

Figure 2. Main drivers of the possession of burglar alarms; a secondary analysis of the International Crime Victims Survey 1989–1992 at regional (NUTS 2) level ($N = 114$). Source: van Dijk (1995).

The repeat of the ICVS in 2005 and 2010 allows us to explore this empirically. In 2010, the ICVS was repeated with the usual method of CATI in just eight Western nations, Canada, Denmark, England/Wales, Estonia, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Fortunately these nations showed considerable variation in the penetration of household security in 2005 and the data therefore allow us to test the effects of responsive securitization by examining the link between the level of security penetration measured in the two surveys and the changes in burglary victimization (van Dijk, 2012; van Dijk and Vollaard, 2012). The results show that in England/Wales, The Netherlands, Canada and Germany more people were concerned about their risks and had installed security. In Denmark, Estonia and Switzerland people were less worried and less inclined to take precautionary measures. If we look subsequently at the trends in burglary victimization between 2004 and 2009 (the measure of risk being that in the year before fieldwork), a divergent pattern emerges. In England/Wales, The Netherlands and Canada rates have fallen; in Germany and Sweden rates remained stable; and in Denmark, Estonia and Switzerland they went up. The results are graphically depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3 depicts the statistically significant relationship between the level of security in 2005 and the change in burglary victimization between 2004 and 2009. Since ICVS data can, as explained, be disaggregated to the level of individuals, it is possible to analyse the impact of responsive securitization among different segments of the public. Since the purchase of home security is partly (as discussed above) dependent on affluence, this impact might be most pronounced among more affluent parts of the population. Results of the ICVS show how across 12 Western nations the lowest income groups have indeed stepped up their household security to a lesser extent than the middle and upper classes. As was to be expected, the survey also shows that the lowest income quartile has benefited less from the falls in burglary victimization than the rest of the population (van Dijk, 2008). When left to market forces alone, responsive securitization is bound to increase the security gap between the haves and have nots.

Reporting and police performance

Like other victimization surveys, the ICVS asks victims about their behaviour and experiences, including their possible contacts with the police. The ICVS measures levels of reporting to the

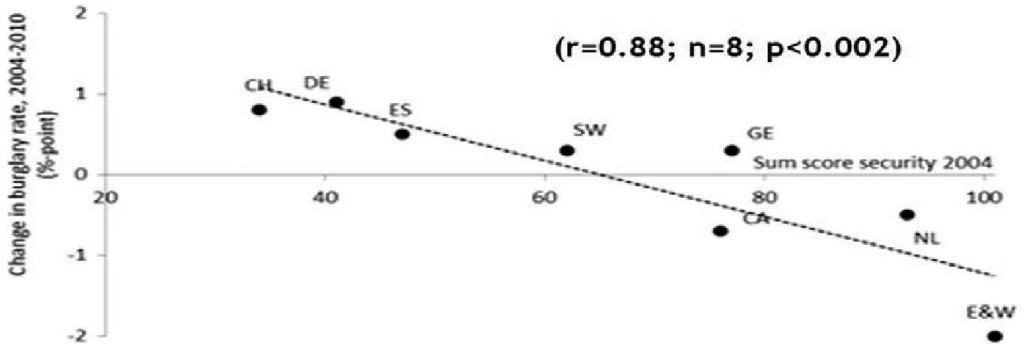

Figure 3. The sum of levels of high-grade locks and burglar alarms in 2005 by changes in burglary rates (% points) between 2004 and 2009; eight countries for which International Crime Victims Survey data were available.

police to see the extent of differences between countries, and whether these help explain variations in police figures at country level. Without going into detail, suffice it to say that fairly marked differences in reporting levels emerge. There are generally higher rates in more affluent countries, but still differences nonetheless. Referring back to the data on which Figure 1 is based, the concordance between police-recorded crime and a measure of ICVS crime *reported to the police* was rather closer than was the case for police-recorded crime and *all* ICVS crime. This is important testimony to the fact that victims' reporting habits are one factor influencing the officially recorded output of police forces.

Although the decision to report a victimization incident has been shown to be mainly driven by a simple cost–benefit assessment, it also serves to some degree as a measure of confidence in the police. Reporting rates tend to be lower in ex-communist countries and countries with relatively new democracies, such as Greece, Spain and Portugal in Europe and many countries in Latin America (van Dijk, 2008). Using data from the ICVS 2000, Goudriaan (2005) found that country-level variations in reporting property crimes were related to confidence in local policing (among victims and non-victims); van Dijk et al. (2008) also showed an interrelationship between levels of reporting, confidence in local policing and – a third factor – the degree to which victims who did report felt satisfied with the police response (see below). These findings confirm what many criminologists have always suspected: namely, that rates of crimes recorded by the police reflect the productivity of police forces rather than the national pools of offenders. High recorded crime rates, looking from a comparative perspective, such as those of the Scandinavian countries, reflect favourably on the performance of national police forces rather than negatively, as was traditionally often assumed by the police community.

Victims' satisfaction with the police response

If they had reported to the police, victims were asked in the ICVS whether they were satisfied with the police response. The answers to this question offer a rare opportunity to assess the implementation of international legal standards concerning the treatment of victims by the police, such as the 1985 Victim's Declaration of the United Nations and the 2001 European Union (EU) Council Framework Decision on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings (in 2013 transposed into the Directive on Victims Rights). According to the results of the ICVS 2005, on average 53% of reporting victims were satisfied with the way the police had handled their complaint. The respondents in

Denmark (75%), Finland (72%), Switzerland (72%), Australia, Scotland and Luxembourg (70%) were most satisfied after reporting any of the five crimes considered, although figures in several other countries were not far behind. The police response was considered least satisfactory in Estonia (17%), Peru (18%), Maputo (27%), Greece (28%) and Mexico (28%). Also considerably lower than the average were satisfaction levels in Japan (44%), Italy (43%), Hungary (41%), Bulgaria (40%), Johannesburg (36%), Istanbul (33%) and Sao Paulo (32%). Satisfaction levels did not differ between different types of crime in the countries/cities. In developing countries, victims of property crimes tend to be more dissatisfied than victims of contact crimes because they would have liked more effective support in recovering stolen goods (van Dijk, 1999). The findings point to serious deficiencies in the treatment of victims by the police in several countries, including some EU member states.

The enactment of binding legislation on victims' rights in the EU makes it pertinent to monitor trends in victim satisfaction with the police over time. In this regard, a comparison between the results of the ICVS 2000 and ICVS 2005 is important (van Dijk and Groenhuijsen, 2007). Although numbers are small, it is striking that in so many Western countries levels of victim satisfaction with the police have significantly gone down since 2000. This is most markedly the case in England and Wales and the USA (with a drop of 10 percentage points), The Netherlands (minus 9), Canada (minus 8) and Sweden (minus 7). Nation-specific crime victim surveys in England/Wales and The Netherlands, using much larger samples, have also registered a decline in satisfaction in recent years (Allen et al., 2006; van Dijk & Groenhuijsen, 2007). This intriguing result can be interpreted in different ways. One explanation is that victims are treated as professionally as before but that expectations among victims have been raised to the point that they no longer feel satisfied. Police forces may now also ask victims whether they want to be informed about the investigation. If subsequently no information is given, victims might be more upset than if the offer had not been made in the first place. Another possible interpretation is that police forces have bureaucraticized the reporting of crimes, for example by inviting reporting on the internet. In addition, in countries where special provisions for victims outside the police have been set up, police forces may feel that victim needs are being duly met if a referral is made to such support agencies. It seems striking in this respect that in Europe victims are generally more satisfied with the police in countries where victim support outside the police hardly exists, such as Denmark, France, Finland and Luxembourg. Police forces in the USA, Canada, the UK and The Netherlands may be inclined to relegate victim support to existing, well-functioning outside agencies. As will be shown below, the latter hypothesis finds support in the ICVS data on the reception of specialized victim support. It is precisely in the countries where victim support is most often received that satisfaction with the police has declined (e.g., the UK, the USA and The Netherlands).

Those respondents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with the way the police handled their report of a crime were asked why (multiple responses were again allowed). Overall, the main reason for dissatisfaction was that the police 'did not do enough'. One in five victims mentioned impoliteness as a source of dissatisfaction, although among those reporting sexual incidents the figure was one in three. Again, considering the EC 2001 instructions on the rights of crime victims to be treated with respect for their dignity, this result is disappointing. To determine possible shifts in the relative importance of different types of complaints a comparison was made of the relative frequency of response categories in the various ICVS sweeps. Of particular interest were the percentages of reasons given that fell into the category 'did not give sufficient information'. The complaint about lack of information made up 7% of all reasons given in 1996 and 2000, but 12% in 2005. This upward trend in victims complaining about lack of information is visible across the EU.

Victim support

Victims who had reported to the police any of four types of crime with the most serious consequences for victims – burglary with entry, robbery, sexual incidents and threats and assaults – were asked whether they had received support from a specialized agency. Such support was described as 'information or practical or emotional support'. Those who had not received any help were asked whether they would have appreciated help in getting such information or practical or emotional support. Using this information, estimates were made of the proportion of victims wanting specialized help that actually received it (the take-up rate of existing specialized victim support agencies) (van Dijk et al., 2008).

For the victims of the four types of crimes together, 9% had received specialized support in 2005. Victims of sexual offences were most likely to receive support (30% did so). Less than one in 10 of victims reporting robberies or threats and assaults had received help (robbery: 8%; threat/assault: 8%). Victims of burglaries with entry had much less often received help (4%).

In most countries support is mainly offered to victims of contact crimes (robbery and crimes of violence) and only rarely to victims of burglary. Only in the UK, The Netherlands and Belgium do 10% or more of burglary victims receive support. The coverage rates of specialized support agencies for crime victims are the highest in New Zealand (24%), the UK (19%) and the USA (16%). Within continental Europe, victim support is most developed in the North West. Globally, least support seems to be available in Hungary (0.4%), Lima (1%), Bulgaria (1%), Finland (2%), Germany (2%), Greece (2%), Maputo (2%), Turkey/Istanbul (2%), Italy (3%) and Spain (3%).

The proportion of victims contacted by victim support after they have reported to the police seems to have grown since 1996/2000 in a number of countries, although few differences are statistically robust. Increases since 1988 can be observed in Austria (from 8% to 13%), Canada (9% to 14%), Belgium (4% to 13%), Japan (0% to 8%) and the USA (11% to 16%), as well as in Northern Ireland (11% to 21%) and Scotland (10% to 22%). In countries with long-established nationwide infrastructures for victim support such as England and Wales, The Netherlands and Sweden, the degree of coverage has remained stable or declined. Elsewhere the coverage of victim support has remained at the same comparatively low levels or even declined further.

Victims who had *not* received support were asked whether it would have been useful. On average 42% of victims reporting any of the four types of crime felt such help would indeed have been useful for them. Two out of three victims of sexual offences (68%) expressed a need for such help. Roughly four out of 10 of the victims of the three other types of crime would have appreciated such help. As reported above, victims of burglary are less likely to receive help in most countries. However, the percentage of burglary victims who would have welcomed support is not much lower than among victims of robbery or threat and assault (burglary, 40%; robbery, 44%; threat and assault, 42%).

The results indicate that the need for help among victims of serious crime is widespread, although not universal. The percentage of victims who would have appreciated help but did not receive it was 50% or higher in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. In developed nations only 30% or 40% expressed such needs. The distribution of the need for help across regions is the reverse of that to its actual reception. In developing countries many more victims would have wanted such help. This is partly due to the fact that in those countries such help is rarely offered and partly due to fewer other general provisions of health care or social work being available. Among developed countries, the percentages of victims who would have liked to receive victim support tends to be smaller in countries with extended welfare states, such as Austria (26%), Germany (27%), Canada (27%) and The Netherlands (30%). Higher percentages were found in the

USA (38%), England and Wales (45%) and especially in some Southern European countries (Spain: 68%; Portugal: 70%).

Globally, 9% of victims of the four more serious crimes considered received specialized help. Of those who did not get help, 43% expressed a needed for it. Thus, the proportion of victims whose needs for special assistance are met can be approximated by dividing the proportion of victims who received support (making an assumption that they needed it) by the sum of those who received support and those who would have wanted it. Such a calculation shows that in the last couple of years victim support agencies provided services to roughly a fifth of victims with manifest needs. Using the same formula, victim support organizations reach about a third of victims of sexual offences in need of help, a fifth of victims of robbery and threats/assaults with needs, and a tenth of victims of burglaries. For all four groups the supply of specialized help falls short of the demand. The gap between supply and demand for victim support is by far the largest for the group of burglary victims.

The proportion of victims of more serious crimes whose expressed needs are actually met by support agencies vary across countries. The proportions actually contacted by victim support are the highest in North America and North-Western Europe (New Zealand: 47%; USA: 33%, The Netherlands: 35%). Take-up rates in the range of 10–25% are achieved in several other Western countries. However, besides developing countries, there were several affluent Western countries where victim support reached only a tiny proportion of victims in need of help (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Italy and Germany). The provision of these services, a mandatory obligation under EU law, shows high variation among the member states of the EU.

Attitudes towards crime and criminal justice

The ICVS has always included a small set of questions on perceptions and attitudes. As shown above (Figure 3), perceptions of the likelihood of victimization by burglary are related to actual risk of victimization by burglary at the regional level. This relationship has consistently been found both at the individual and collective level (van Dijk et al., 2008). More tellingly, analyses of trends in victimization rates by burglary and risk perceptions over time have confirmed the relationship. Risk perceptions track trends in actual victimization risks and show the same curvilinear trend between 1989 and 2010, peaking around 2000 (van Dijk and Vollaard, 2012; van Kesteren et al., 2000). In all ICVS rounds the classical question about feelings of safety in one's own neighbourhood at night has been retained. At the individual level, answers are strongly related to gender, with females feelings more insecure. At the collective level, the association with actual levels of victimization by contact crimes has consistently been found to be weak. Feelings of insecurity are relatively high in several countries with low levels of common criminality, such as Japan, Germany and Italy. This lack of a clear relationship is confirmed by trend analyses (van Kesteren et al., 2000). These negative findings suggest that the feelings of insecurity in one's neighbourhood are only loosely connected to real victimization risks; rather, feelings of insecurity seem more to reflect concern about rising crime, which is largely driven by external factors such as neighbourhood cohesion or sensational media reporting (Baier and Pfeiffer, 2013).

Seriousness rating by victims

In the second ICVS a new question was added to the battery of questions that victims were asked. The new question asked victims to assess the seriousness of what had happened to them. The question asked was 'Taking everything into account, how serious was the incident for you (or your

household)? Was it serious, not so serious, or not very serious?' This item was introduced in response to criticism levelled at the report on the first ICVS that international comparisons of overall or even crime-specific prevalence rates of victimization ignored possible national differences in the perceived seriousness of victimization experiences. Seriousness scaling surveys of the general public had been conducted in the USA and some European countries in the 1970s, with the aim of informing prosecution and sentencing policies (Sellin and Wolfgang, 1964). In the ICVS the question is only put to those who had been recently victimized. The answers therefore reflect the subjective assessment of people with concrete and fresh experience of victimization.

In the reports on the second ICVS, overall victimization rates were weighted for seriousness assessment by victims (van Dijk and Mayhew, 1992). The results showed that country rankings were not significantly altered by this correction (van Dijk and Mayhew, 1992; van Kesteren et al., 2000). The inclusion of the seriousness question allowed further analyses touching upon issues that seem fundamental to the conduct of comparative international surveys on crime. Mean scores were computed for 17 different offence types or sub-types. Somewhat surprisingly, car thefts where the car was not recovered were viewed most seriously. Next most serious were sexual assaults, then car thefts even if the car was recovered, and then robbery involving a weapon. Assaults with force were scored lower, much on a par with burglaries with entry. The least serious crimes were car vandalism, theft from cars and bicycle theft. Results in following ICVS sweeps were similar (van Kesteren et al., 2000). These results are noteworthy in themselves. They indicate that seriousness assessments by actual victims are determined by the two dimensions of material loss and threats to physical integrity. The fact that the material loss inflicted upon households by car thefts was assessed as the most serious type of victimization may underline the special emotional value of car ownership in modern societies, as well as the inconvenience and financial consequences involved. The seriousness of intrusions of a sexual nature (typically experienced by women) and property crimes with the use of force is perhaps less surprising. Of offence types that only cause material loss household burglary is deemed the most serious.

The next research issue to be addressed was whether these rankings of crime in terms of seriousness are relatively universal or variable by country. This touches upon an underlying assumption of the ICVS, namely that people in different countries share roughly similar understandings of what common types of criminality mean. Interestingly, overall mean scores of the 17 different types of crime did not differ much by country; the ranking of offences in seriousness terms was highly similar across countries.[2] The only inter-country differences were that property crimes were assessed somewhat more seriously in some developing countries compared to assaults and that North American victims did not rate car theft as the most serious type of crime (van Dijk, 1999). This finding seems in line with the higher economic value of material possessions in poorer countries. Analyses of the data of the ICVS 2000 produced the same results (van Kesteren et al, 2000). In Denmark, one of the most affluent European countries, car theft was as in North America not judged quite as serious as elsewhere. The consistency of seriousness assessments by victims suggests that people in different countries and years have similar attitudinal thresholds about the seriousness of different crimes. It also suggests that people do not differ very much in the types of incidents that they tell interviewers about when they are offered colloquial definitions of crime types used in the ICVS, such as assaults or burglaries. The results thus indicate a high degree of consensus about the definition and import of different types of conventional crimes. Among urban populations across the world, people share a core set of ideas about what constitutes common criminality

and how serious it is. This is in line with the hypothesis of universally shared 'intuitions of justice' (Mikhail, 2007; Robinson and Darley, 2007).

A multi-level analysis of punitiveness

From the outset the ICVS has included a question on what respondents regarded as an appropriate punishment for a recidivist burglar. Here again the ICVS datasets allow analyses at both the macro and micro levels. Van Kesteren (2009) conducted a multi-level analysis on the results from the 2004/2005 ICVS covering 23 developed, Western countries. A scale was constructed based on the preferred mode of punishment (suspended sentence, community service, fine and imprisonment) and the length of the prison sentence. At the micro level, a topical issue is whether actual victims of burglary will hold more punitive attitudes towards offenders than non-victims. In the multi-level analysis seven variables were entered at individual level, including whether or not the respondent was a recent victim of household burglary.

Several authors have interpreted the more severe penal policies of the USA and several European countries in the wider political framework of neo-liberalism and the rollback of the welfare state, which can be assumed to increase inequality (Pratt et al., 2005; Wilkinson and Picket, 2009). For this reason, a measure of socio-economic inequality at the country level (the Gini coefficient) was entered as one of the independent variables besides victimization by any crime, level of educational attainment and gross domestic product (GDP).

The results of the multi-level analysis can be summed up as follows. The variables that have some impact on punitiveness at the individual level are sex (males were more punitive); low satisfaction with the performance of the police in controlling crime; a low level of education; and a younger age. Contrary to expectations, the findings concerning the victimization–punitiveness link were negative, countering the notion that those recently victimized by common crime are on average more punitive than others. These results are broadly in line with those of previous ICVS analyses and other studies (Baier and Pfeiffer, 2013). It must be said, however, that the effect of these variables on punitiveness is rather small.

The effects at the country level are more substantial. In countries with higher crime rates, the public is more punitive, even though actual victims are not so. Furthermore, the wealth of a country plays no part in determining either harsh or lenient attitudes towards punishment, although the differences in income as measured by the Gini coefficient does. As expected, in countries with large differences in income, the general public is more punitive.

In summary, then, the multi-level analysis confirmed that the strongest oredictor of punitiveness was a high rate of crime at country level (as measured by victimization by any crime). The second most important explanatory factor was a measure of economic inequality (the Gini coefficient). Together, these two country-level variables explained almost half of the inter-country variance. Some individual ('micro') characteristics are statistically significant but do not contribute much to explaining punitiveness at country level. It is also worth noting that GDP per capita, educational attainment and attitudes towards police performance appeared to be unrelated to punitiveness at the country level. Moreover, while the country-level variable of being Anglophone has appeared previously to be associated with greater punitiveness (Mayhew and van Kesteren, 2002), this factor was not itself relevant once income inequality and national crime levels were controlled for. This suggests that there is little reason to suggest that specific cultural factors, such as the use of common law, explain punitiveness in the Anglophone countries, other than those related to economic inequality.

Conclusion and discussion

Victimization surveys are now firmly established in criminological research in very many countries. However, surveys comparing the level and nature of crime internationally are a rather newer enterprise than standalone national surveys, although the ICVS itself started over two decades ago. It came into its own because of growing recognition of the difficulties of comparing police figures. Initial scepticism about the feasibility of interviewing samples of the population in different countries using a standardized questionnaire has gradually been overcome. Independent reviews have confirmed the superiority of the ICVS over comparisons of independent national surveys (Lynch, 1996). The ICVS finding that victims across the world assess the relative seriousness of different types of crime very similarly lends support to the value of comparative study; there is a high degree of communality in prevailing definitions of crime.

The arrival of several national victimization surveys and in particular the ICVS has given a boost to epidemiological studies on crime. While the ICVS has not provided impeccable or comprehensive data by any means, it has arguably improved on what can be gained from police records as regards comparative levels and patterns of victimization in different parts of the world. From the outset the ICVS reports have highlighted the close links between opportunity structures such as ownership of different types of vehicles and patterns of crime. It has offered opportunities to revisit classical issues, such as the links between alcohol abuse or gun ownership and violent crime, using victimization rates as a dependent variable. It has also offered an important addition to the picture from police records on trends in crime, including a focus of attention on the importance of victim-centred factors, such as the level of security measures taken by potential victims as drivers of the universal drop in crime. In these respects, mainstream criminology has benefited from the development of victimology as a separate field of empirical studies looking at those at the receiving end of crime.

Besides providing an alternative count of crime, the ICVS has also helped to test several victimological theories. Analyses of its datasets have shown that the risks of victimization depend on personal characteristics, which are very similar across countries in either enhancing or ameliorating risks. Analyses have also shown that repeat victimization accounts for a large amount of victimization everywhere. Other special analyses have shed light on the impact of gun ownership on gun-related crime at both the individual and collective levels. Follow-up questions to victims have offered insights into how victims are similar in some ways, and differ in others in their responses to victimization and the needs they have arising from it. ICVS results allow governments to benchmark their policies regarding the treatment of victims by the police or by victim support organizations.

Developments and prospects

While the ICVS has shown that it is feasible to conduct standardized surveys in a large number of countries, it nonetheless carries several practical lessons. Conducting surveys in a standardized way, more or less on time, and with sound adherence to the ICVS template posed a considerable logistical challenge. Tight oversight from the central team was needed to ensure that country coordinators engaged with tedious technical detail to maintain consistency. Financial matters were time-consuming and challenging, especially with regard to developing countries. Moreover, there were occasional issues as regards ownership of results. When and how these were released was also a minefield – as crime 'league tables' are politically sensitive. For countries taking part that had

their own national surveys, country coordinators also sometimes needed to be able to explain why the ICVS could give different results to victimization risks than national surveys.

Policy interest in international comparisons of crime using victimization surveys has been enhanced by the results to date. Thus, countries are likely to be keen to enter into future comparative survey exercises – especially if fieldwork costs are met. However, even where self-funding is necessary, countries that have not taken part in a standardized survey to date may want to sign up, particularly when they have insufficient resources for a bespoke national survey. This makes it attractive for them to take a ride on the back of another survey vehicle, especially when comparisons with other countries are on offer. A striking example of this are the repeats of nationwide surveys based on the ICVS in Georgia in 2010, 2011 and 2012, which have demonstrated a very significant drop in crime (van Dijk and Chanturia, 2011). An abridged version of the ICVS has also been used in 2012 in Moldova, Tadjikistan and Azerbaijan (van Dijk, 2013). This said, the conduct of victimization surveys in developing countries seems to have stayed somewhat behind. This is unfortunate, since in many of these countries crime remains a major concern and statistics of recorded crimes are of poor quality, if they exist at all.

The logistical challenges of mounting comparative victimization surveys remain. So too do the methodological challenges of improving crime measurement internationally through survey techniques that are hard to standardize in diverse environments. 'Survey saturation' in Westernized countries may also become an issue, whatever mode of interviewing is adopted. Over the lifetime of the ICVS, the development of CATI has reduced fieldwork costs and helped consistent questionnaire administration. Now, though, many people (particularly more heavily victimized younger ones) rely only on mobile phones. A key issue is whether viable representative samples can be obtained with the growing diversity of telephone provision – although survey companies will be under strong commercial pressure to achieve a solution. The inclusion of mobile phone users in sampling designs is an obvious priority. As internet use grows, Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) offers a way forward for surveys in the future, with cost advantages. Pilot testing with CAWI for the national victimization surveys in The Netherlands and Finland has begun, with fairly encouraging results. However, the methodological challenges of CAWI include possible bias due to differential internet access, a degree of respondent self-selection, and mode effects (possibly resulting in inflated rates for some types of victimization; Beulens et al., 2012). In the medium to long term, ways round these problems may be found, particularly by using incentives and representative panels that polling companies are increasingly likely to offer.

What of initiatives currently in place for further international comparative surveys? At present there are no elaborate plans to repeat the ICVS globally. However, there have been other developments afoot – albeit with a less global focus – which have taken, or are taking forward comparative survey-based measures of victimization in different countries. An initiative, led by Eurostat, is a standardized household victimization survey – the EU Safety Survey. The survey can be seen as an extension of the EU's sponsorship of the 2004/2005 ICVS. It is intended to meet the perceived need for a full EU-wide comparative survey tailored to the current legal and social realities of the EU and its particular policy interests. The results will complement the numbers of crimes recorded by the EU Member States annually published by Eurostat. The European Parliament, however, has raised concerns about the utility of the survey (van Dijk, 2013) and at the time of writing, it is uncertain whether and when this survey will actually be executed. One option is that the European Commission will issue a tender for such a survey as it did in 2004. In the meantime, several initiatives have been taken outside Europe to conduct ICVS-based

comparative victimization surveys, for example in Japan which repeated the ICVS in 2012. Most promising are recent developments in Latin America. The Inter American Development Bank is sponsoring a series of surveys in the Caribbean using the core parts of the ICVS questionnaire, and the Centre of Excellence UNODC/UNEGE in Mexico City is coordinating a round of surveys across Latin America. Hopefully, the impetus for future, global rounds of the ICVS will come from these new regional initiatives.

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Notes

1. Results have been presented in a series of research reports with extensive documentation on the survey's methodology (Mayhew and van Dijk, 1997; van Dijk, 2013; van Dijk and Mayhew, 1992; van Dijk et al., 1990, 2008; van Kesteren et al., 2000).
2. Rankings were calculated for six world regions. The regional rankings correlated strongly with the overall global ranking with coefficients over 0.90 for five regions and 0.79 for Africa.

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